

**NEW
ART**
examiner

Established 1973

THE INDEPENDENT VOICE OF THE VISUAL ARTS

Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, New York

Volume 34 No. 1 September/October 2019

ENDLESS FORMS



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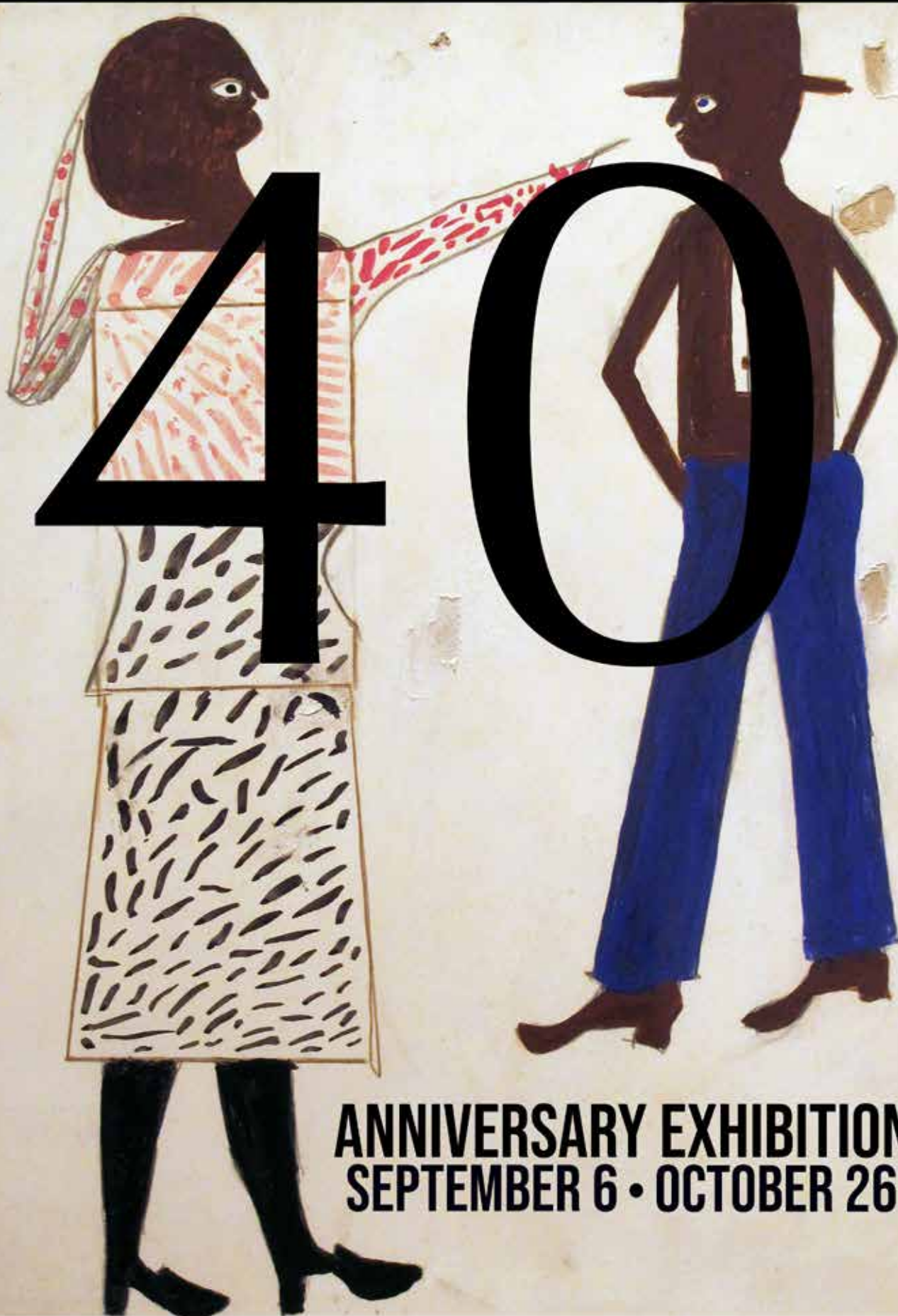
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A visit with a photographic great, the late Barbara Crane

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New Art Examiner

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www.newartexaminer.org

Cover Design:
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The *New Art Examiner* is indexed in:
 Art Bibliographies Modern, Art Full Text &
 Art Index Retrospective and Zetoc

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WANTED: WRITERS

The ***New Art Examiner*** is looking for writers interested in the visual arts in any major metropolitan area in the U.S. You would start with short reviews of exhibition in your area. Later, longer essays on contemporary visual art issues could be accepted.

Please send a sample of your writing (no more than a few pages) to:

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The *New Art Examiner* is a publication whose purpose is to examine the definition and transmission of culture in our society; the decision-making processes within museums and schools and the agencies of patronage which determine the manner in which culture shall be transmitted; the value systems which presently influence the making of art as well as its study in exhibitions and books; and, in particular, the interaction of these factors with the visual art milieu.

EDITORIAL POLICY

As the *New Art Examiner* has consistently raised the issues of conflict of interest and censorship, we think it appropriate that we make clear to our readers the editorial policy we have evolved since our inception:

1. No writer may review an exhibition originated or curated by a fellow faculty member or another employee, or any past or present student, from the institution in which they are currently employed. The *New Art Examiner* welcomes enthusiastic and sincere representation, so the editor can assign such an exhibition to other writers without the burden of conflict of interest.
2. There shall be no editorial favor in response to the purchase of advertisements.
3. The *New Art Examiner* welcomes all letters to the Editor and guarantees publishing. Very occasionally letters may be slightly edited for spelling or grammar or if the content is considered to be libellous.
4. The *New Art Examiner* does not have an affiliation with any particular style or ideology or social commitment that may be expressed or represented in any art form. All political, ethical and social commentary is welcome. The *New Art Examiner* has actively sought diversity. All opinions are solely of the writer. This applies equally to editorial staff when they pen articles under their own name.
5. The general mandate of the *New Art Examiner* is well defined in the statement of purpose above.

ENDLESS FORMS: Introduction

Our editor-in-chief, Michel Ségard, likes to say that art and science are much the same thing. Reflecting on these words, we remembered the famous last lines of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*: "*From so simple a beginning **endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.***"

Endless forms—wonderful, perhaps, but not always beautiful—are site-specific artist Tara Donovan's stock-in-trade. Assistant Editor Nathan Worcester traces the evolution of the sublime to understand why her recent exhibition at the Smart was so moving. With the backdrop of economic inequality, climate change, and other selective pressures, Phillip Barcio speaks with the 2019 Chicago Architecture Biennial's executive director, Todd Palmer, about the event's ongoing adaptation during these interesting times.

Speaking of societal turmoil, K.A. Letts considers "Landlord Colors: On Art, Economy, and Materiality," which posits a kind of convergent evolution by artists in Detroit, Turin, Athens, Seoul, and Havana in the midst of similar upheavals. Reviewing "After Stonewall: 1969-1989," Michel Ségard documents an epoch in the LGBTQ community that was, to bastardize Stephen J. Gould, all punctuation and no equilibrium.

Sometimes the greatest changes can be traced through the practice of a single, dynamic individual. Emelia Lehmann

describes how Tetsuya Noda's unique, diaristic prints have both shifted and stayed the same over the decades. Another lone genius, Martin Beck, explains his approach to figure drawing. In his interview with *New Art Examiner* veteran Diane Thodos, Beck challenges art-making strategies that capitalize on mass production: "*I think a good piece of art that is handmade shows the artist's journey. They talk about Degas always struggling to find the form... When you take a piece of art that's been fabricated, made to order, you don't feel anything. Do you feel the factory worker making it?*"

As if in answer, Rebecca Memoli reviews the MCA's retrospective on powerhouse artist, fashion designer, and Kanye associate Virgil Abloh. Abloh tries to avoid changing his designs by more than 3%—a canny adaptation to the marketplace and a challenge to the likes of Beck. Are the two philosophies in competition? If so, which is the fittest in a neoliberal order?

We hope you find these and our other articles inspiring, especially if you are a practitioner. Though the art world can be an unforgiving ecosystem, there are many niches to exploit (or, more politely, explore). May the forms remain endless—and may human creativity continue to evolve.

The Editors

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"...and other such stories": Re-Framing the Narrative of Contemporary Architecture

by Phillip Barcio

Architecture does more than simply fulfill the utilitarian need for built spaces. It also defines the cultural priorities of the civilization that creates it. A building isn't just a container. It's an aesthetic statement—a declaration of how a society prioritizes its resources, its people, and its culture.

Since its inauguration in 2015, the Chicago Architectural Biennial has been on the forefront of the conversation about architecture's duality of purpose.

The 2015 edition, titled "The State of the Art of Architecture," broadly looked at the ways innovators within the architectural field were evolving to address contemporary social concerns, while the 2017 edition, "MAKE NEW HISTORY," reflected on the ways new modes of architectural production connect to the roll-out of civic progress.

The 2019 edition considerably ups the ante. Titled "...and other such stories," its curatorial vision positions architecture not as a singular discipline at all, but as a tool to be wielded to initiate cultural change. Artistic Director Yesomi Umolu and her curatorial team of Sepake Angiama and Paulo Tavares frame the architectural field as a platform through which architects and non-architects alike can address a range of contemporary social concerns.

The exhibitor roster represents 20 nations and includes a multi-generational, multi-racial, and multi-disciplinary perspective. A significant number of the more than 80 participants identify not as architects, but as visual artists, activists, performers, academics, and historians.

In addition to broadening the type of exhibitor invited to participate, "...and other such stories" will increase the footprint of the Biennial, expanding the reach of its message to audiences that might not otherwise encounter the show. Along with its main venue—the Chicago Cultural Center, at Washington Street and Michigan Avenue, across from Grant Park—simultaneous programming will unfold at sites all over the city, hosted by more than 40 outside partners, including the Art Institute of Chicago, the Elmhurst Art Museum, the National Public Housing Museum, Navy Pier, Carrie

Secrist Gallery, The 606 with the High Line Network, and Wrightwood 659.

We're not just talking about the architectural pictures and models you might expect. Visitors will be treated to theatrical performances, educational experiences, art shows, and other novel programming aimed at demonstrating the crucial role architecture plays in everything from climate change to social justice.

The evolution of the Chicago Architecture Biennial from what could have merely been a professional event for architects into a cultural event centered on architecture's role in the broader culture has been led in part by Todd Palmer, who serves as executive director of the organization.

"Rather than just focusing on an examination of the latest buildings, we've managed to push the discourse of architecture as a cultural practice," Palmer says. "In the first two editions, we gave respect to the history of architecture and to products and innovations not necessarily pushing aesthetic envelopes, but just thinking about how we can look at what came before. We asked how we can establish practices that make looking to the past and learning from the past essential to the practice of architecture."

Palmer's background in architectural theory and history has made him especially interested in discovering the evolving expectations people have for their built environments.

"Absolutely this is about social change," Palmer says. "But I would argue that architecture has always been a tool for change. So the question is, what does change mean?"



Todd Palmer. Photo by Zachary Johnston.

As an example, Palmer points out that an architect's work intrinsically addresses climate change, whether it's meant to or not. If architects choose to become as literate as possible about the effects of their materials and processes, they can at least claim their agency in the effort to stabilize the climate, rather than bumbling through their work without any knowledge of exactly how it might affect the ecosystem.

Another example Palmer gives has to do with changing questions about whose needs the built environment is intended to serve.

"If you build a palace in Versailles, you're addressing the needs of a king and not the people," he says.

If an architect is designing a public space, that work needs to be done in a more conscientious, collaborative way if the space is truly going to serve the public good.

"These things are not un-connected," says Palmer. "It's a question of context. You're impacting the social sphere either by your attention or your lack of attention. Architects have unique skills, so they need to invite other professions and crafts to be at the table together. The organization of so many sub-disciplines is needed to execute a work of architecture that addresses a social question."

One word Palmer likes to use when he talks about the goals of the Biennial is literacy. Another is learning.

"In this day and age, learning is something that must be continuous," Palmer says. "When I was in school, I thought I'd get a master's degree and a PhD and then be done, but I was quickly disavowed of that notion. The technological changes of the digital environment, along with changing social pressures—the only way to keep up is to learn."

In respect to their broad educational potential, Palmer highlighted for us three of this year's exhibitors. First is the work of Emmanuel Pratt and Sweet Water Foundation, which Palmer says "is something not to miss."

"He has been working around the South Side of Chicago," says Palmer. "He's trained as an architect but has been working on creating an urban farm. But more than that, he expanded it to incorporate a carpentry workshop that created the first barn in Chicago since the 19th century. It gets into ecology and creating an ecosystem that involves business and entrepreneurship."

For the Biennial, Pratt has been working to recreate the worker's bungalow, using it as a tool to train the carpenters.

"The whole thing is about using vacant lots and creating something that can be replicated and scaled," Palmer says. "The work connects architecture and fields that go far beyond it."

Another exhibitor Palmer is excited about is the City of Detroit Planning and Development Department (PDD). As a leading player in the redevelopment of one of the largest American post-industrial cities, PDD is expected by Palmer to offer a range of valuable and unique lessons that transcend what visitors might ordinarily think of as the domain of architecture.

Palmer also points to a project by Ilze Wolff, an architect from South Africa, which will recreate "an evocation of a house" built by an African woman in the time of Apartheid. The project blends architectural visions of the professional with those of the untrained, offering viewers an inspirational point of departure that Palmer sees as essential to the Biennial's success.



Sweet Water Foundation Thought Barn, Chicago, IL (Installation ongoing, September 2017–present).



African Mobilities: This is not a refugee camp exhibition. Munich, 2018, curated by Dr Mpho Matsipa at Architektur Museum TUM,

Model view of exhibition design by @wolffcapetown. Photo by Lindsey Appolis @appster.

The optimism and passion in Palmer's voice is obvious, and the aspirational attitude of this year's Biennial's organizers is undeniable—their idealistic curation strives towards what architecture could be at its most constructive. One cannot even imagine the immense impact that will likely be made by the impending four months of thoughtful, ambitious, city-wide programming, as countless seeds are planted by "...and other such stories" in Chicago communities and beyond.

Nonetheless, I wonder if this ambitious curatorial vision will not also be without its detractors. Is the Biennial really for everyone? The curatorial statement on the Biennial website is almost unreadably dense—clearly intended for an elite audience. And the whole idea of "using" architecture as a social "tool" feels like it comes right out of the colonizer's playbook.

Granted, the strategy of capturing architecture to serve as a weapon for societal change is being wielded here for secular, progressive purposes, but the idea still reeks of power brokers and systemic cultural manipulation. Do we really need teams of academics, artists

and activists descending upon our neighborhoods explaining to us all the ways we are illiterate about the esoteric hidden meanings of our homes and gathering places? Sometimes a house is just a house.

For his part, Palmer is convinced the pedantic qualities of the curation will have positive effects.

"Hopefully, it's a pleasure to come through the Biennial and have your eyes opened to something you've never thought about, or not thought about in this way," he says. "Hopefully viewers will see it as an opportunity to face a challenge."

"...and other such stories," the 2019 Chicago Architectural Biennial, opens September 19, 2019—the same day as EXPO Chicago—and will run through January 5, 2020. For complete programming information, visit chicagoarchitecturebiennial.org.

Phillip Barcio is an art writer and fiction author whose work appears regularly in *Hyperallergic*, *IdeelArt*, *La Gazette Drouot* and the *New Art Examiner*. His fiction has appeared in *Space Squid* and the *Swamp Ape Review*. He has work forthcoming in *Western Humanities Review*.

Fitzgerald Neighborhood Revitalization Plan. Spackman Mossop Michaels.



Sublime for Modern Times: Tara Donovan at the Smart Museum

by Nathan Worchester

Tara Donovan's art grabs you and doesn't let go. Assembled from tar paper, mylar, drinking straws, and other everyday objects, her colossal, site-specific installations transform their surroundings and fill one with awe. Though her works are sometimes beautiful, that quality seems beside the point. She is an architect of the sublime. But what does that really mean?

* * * *

Before going any further, I should explain why I am using such antiquated language. After all, what does beauty have to do with contemporary art? What's more, serious talk of the sublime gradually fizzled out after 1800 (fig. 1)

The terms of this debate were set by Edmund Burke in his entertaining 1757 treatise, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Working within the tradition of British empiricism, Burke sought to differentiate the sublime from the beautiful based chiefly on the psychological reactions with which the two were associated.

According to Burke, the sublime is that which elicits "delight." Somewhat confusingly, however, in Burke's vocabulary, "delight" is not the same thing as pleasure, or at least "positive pleasure." Rather, delight is the species of enjoyment that results from a kind of

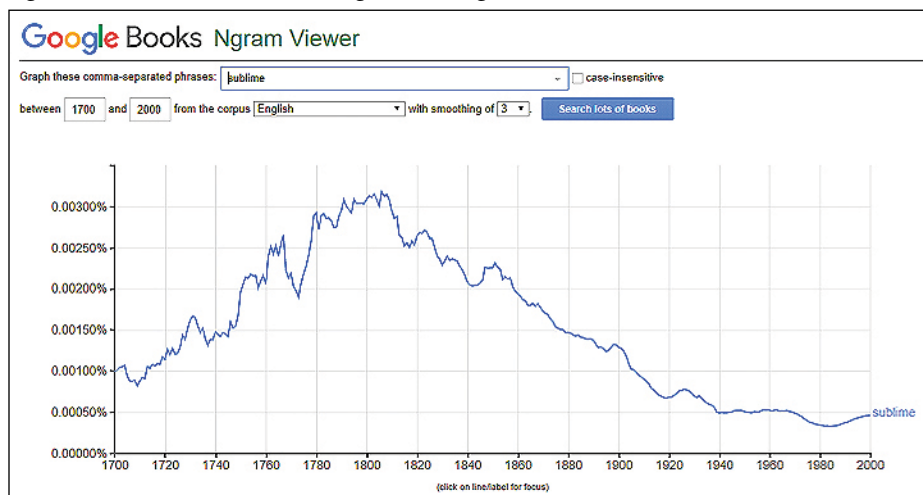
risk-free yet exhilarating encounter with things that would normally cause pain or suggest danger—what he memorably calls "*tranquility tinged with terror*" (*italics added*).¹ In nature or the works of man, the pinnacle of the sublime is that which astonishes. The beautiful, on the other hand, is linked to that which produces positive pleasure. While the sublime tends to be vast, the beautiful tends to be small; where the sublime is rough, the beautiful is smooth. The sublime is grounded in fear and the beautiful in love.

This then is the substance of Burke's famous distinction between the sublime and the beautiful. Of course, he himself admits that it is sketchy. Others might dismiss it as too heavily influenced by the particularities of Burke's viewpoint.² I, for one, would root the sublime in an awareness of death and the self-understanding engendered by that awareness rather than in pain or fear more generally.³

Immanuel Kant was one of those who considered Burke's analysis too subjective. In his 1790 *Critique of Judgment*, Kant argued that Burke's empirical approach could not provide the basis for any normative judgments related to taste. He himself differentiates the sublime from the beautiful based on two uniquely human mental faculties previously described in *Critique of Pure Reason*: the understanding, which synthesizes representations taken from experience into what he calls pure concepts, and reason, which produces concepts or notions ("transcendental ideas") that are definitionally independent of experience.

Kant tells us the beautiful is something with form, which makes it an "indeterminate concept of the understanding." On the other hand, the sublime's "limitlessness" and closely linked "totality" make it "an indeterminate concept of reason."⁴ Thus, a tempest-tossed sea is not

Figure 1: Sublime in decline according to the Google Books Ngram Viewer.





Tara Donovan, *Untitled (Mylar)*, 2011/2019, Mylar and hot glue, dimensions variable. Installation view, "Tara Donovan: *Fieldwork*," Smart Museum of Art, 2019. Courtesy of the artist and Pace Gallery. Photo: Michael Tropea.

inherently sublime. Rather, it is the sort of object that tends to elicit certain associations in people. Those associations in turn lead them to depart their senses and contemplate final metaphysical ends using their faculty of reason.

I might buy Kant's argument if pain, fear, and, more specifically, the fear of death originated independently of experience. Yet it seems impossible to disentangle the origins of pain and fear from experience. If one argues that pain and fear are at least partly innate because biologically evolved, it still does not necessarily follow that they are Kant's transcendental ideas.

Their epistemological differences aside, Burke and Kant broadly agree on what the sublime and the beautiful look like. I see no reason to depart from their overall picture.

Other critics have relied on more recent philosophical work to evaluate Donovan. Jonathan T.D. Neil, for example, relates her pin drawings to the omnipresent screens with which we spend more and more of our waking hours.⁵ For Neil, those pieces update earlier minimalist explorations of the phenomenology of

perception. He places them in the conceptual framework set by Jaron "You Are Not A Gadget" Lanier and other theorists of the Information Age.

Why then do I turn to the unfashionable likes of Burke and Kant? Well, for one, I am less moved by Donovan's pin drawings than by her sculptures. The latter come closer to embodying the sublime (indeed, the very fact that I find them moving in a certain way constitutes their sublimity).

More selfishly, I seek to stand on the shoulders of giants instead of those moderns whose work may prove ephemeral.⁶ Additionally, my approach owes much to Burke and Kant even as I struggle against the limits of their analyses. To rework Edmund Husserl, who called phenomenology a tool for getting "back to the 'things themselves'" ("*Sachen selbst*"),⁷ I hew to Burke in grounding my analysis in what Kant condescendingly labeled "empirical anthropology"—namely, how I and others react to Donovan's work in the real world. I may not get to the things themselves, but at least I will stick with the identifiably human.

* * * *

I first stumbled on Donovan's show, "Tara Donovan: Fieldwork," after shambling through a different exhibition that was opening at the Smart Museum. Escaping the press of bodies and the foul stench of politics, I wandered into another gallery and found myself standing in front of *Untitled 2015/2019*—a towering, interconnected upswelling of Slinkys. Yes, Slinkys—the toy from your childhood. Clever—beautiful—yet something else as well...

"Slinkys!" laughed a man nearby. He waved his wife over and urged her to get a closer look.

As with so many other observers, his mode of engagement shifted in the presence of Donovan's work. The look of Serious Artistic Contemplation gave way to a goofy grin. I, meanwhile, sifted through a mass of associations while viewing the piece: tinsel on a Christmas tree; coral reefs; other artists, such as Jessica Drenk, who have also employed the detritus of consumer culture to whisper organic forms into being.

Donovan's work tempts you to play while hinting at a global sense of threat—comparable, perhaps, to Burke's "tranquility tinged with terror." Like a mysterious abandoned building or the sort of dangerously rickety playground you weren't allowed to visit as a child, it calls out to you. In line with Kant, her art is shot through with "limitlessness"—in this case, a feeling of deliberate incompleteness or uncontainability. The site-specific nature of Donovan's art also gestures toward the infinite. As long as she is alive and producing art, her restlessly generative practice offers an open horizon.

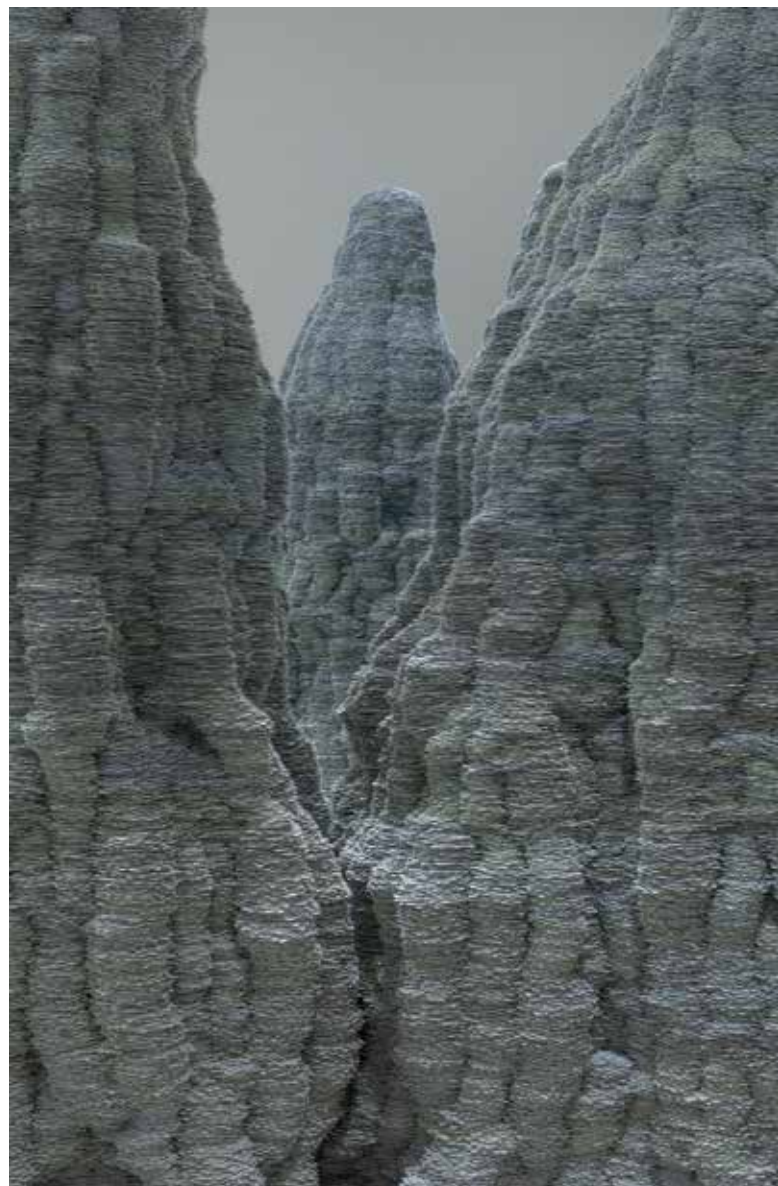
Though "rhizomatic" is a buzzword, as a biological metaphor, it justly applies to *Untitled (Mylar Tape)*, 2007/2019. Beneath the skillfully arranged gallery lights, this piece is a living thing; give it time and it could envelop the world in its pearlescent tentacles. The fungiform *Untitled 2018* (Mylar, tape, and hot glue) also mesmerizes. Like a pointillist painting projected into the third dimension, the dense, shining form seems to mushroom outwards, straining against its rectilinear perimeter.

A brief and deeply unscientific study of the #tara-donovan hashtag on Instagram, which has been used more than 13,400 times, reveals countless image-conscious young women (and at least one man) staging deep, social media-worthy reactions to Donovan's work. One of them is comedienne Ali Wong, who looks, well, astonished. Burke would be pleased.

In the northeast section of the exhibition, *Haze 2003/2019* partakes of the sublime and the beautiful in roughly equal measure. Seen from afar, its undulant surface has many of the qualities Burke associated with beauty: smoothness; delicacy; gradual variation. Yet when I learned that it was composed of translucent drinking straws, different associations came to mind. Considered objectively, the Great Pacific Garbage Patch is a terrifying prospect. Subtly evoked in this space, however, it subsides to a worry in the back of one's mind

As I approached the piece, a group of kids—young enough to play unselfconsciously; old enough to fear death—were dashing away from it.

Tara Donovan, *Untitled*, 2014/2019, Styrene index cards, metal, wood, paint, and glue, 12 feet 5-1/2 inches x 22 feet 4 inches x 22 feet 11-1/2 inches. Installation view, "Tara Donovan: *Fieldwork*," Smart Museum of Art, 2019. Courtesy of the artist and Pace Gallery. Photo: Michael Tropea.



"If you press your ear against it, you'll hear a roar," one of them explained.

I leaned toward *Haze*, careful not to touch it. Crouching in that pleasant, climate-controlled setting, I suddenly felt like my eardrum would burst. The millisecond of fear passed, but a faint impression remained.

"Tara Donovan: Fieldwork" is on view at the Smart Museum of Art, Chicago from June 14 through September 22, 2019.

Nathan Worcester is a writer and assistant editor of the *New Art Examiner*. All comments welcome via nworcester@gmail.com or on Twitter @theworcesterest.

- 1 Burke, Edmund, *A Philosophical Inquiry...*, Part IV, Section VII, accessed at <https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/b/burke/edmund/sublime/part4.html#part4.19> on August 9, 2019
- 2 A modern feminist critic might argue that Burke's empirically grounded conceptualization of the beautiful is largely a product of his 18th century male gaze. Consider also Burke's unintentionally funny description of how "love" is experienced; it's so rigid and specific that it seems likely to have emerged from the self-examination of a relatively passionless man, which he then recasts as a more searching examination of the world: "The head reclines something on one side; the eyelids are more closed than usual, and the eyes roll gently with an inclination to the object; the mouth is a little opened, and the breath drawn slowly, with now and then a low sigh; the whole body is composed, and the hands fall to the sides. All of this is accompanied with an inward sense of melting and languor" (Burke, Edmund, *A Philosophical Inquiry...*, Part IV, Section XIX, accessed at <https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/b/burke/edmund/sublime/part4.html#part4.19> on August 9, 2019).
- 3 On my reading, an appreciation for the sublime or beautiful is something one grows into, perhaps imperceptibly. In fairness, Burke does not ignore death: "There are very few pains, however exquisite, which are not preferred to death: nay, what generally makes pain itself, if I may say so, more painful, is, that it is considered as an emissary of this kind of terrors" (Ibid., Part I, Section VII).
- 4 Kant, Immanuel. *The Critique of Judgement*. Part I: Critique of Aesthetic Judgement, trans. James Creed Meredith. Accessed at <https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/k/kant/immanuel/k16j/book2.html>, August 9, 2019.
- 5 Neil, Jonathan T.D. "The Screen," in Tara Donovan (New York: The Pace Gallery, 2015); and Tara Donovan: Drawings (Pins) (New York: The Pace Gallery, 2011)
- 6 Jaron Lanier already seems a bit 2011. Of course, anyone might seem giant today if they're promoted by The New York Times.
- 7 Husserl, Edmund, *Logical Investigations*, Vol. 1, trans. J.N. Findlay, 2001, pp. 168

Tara Donovan, *Haze*, 2003/2019, translucent plastic drinking straws, dimensions variable. Installation view, "Tara Donovan: Fieldwork," Smart Museum of Art, 2019. Courtesy of the artist and Pace Gallery. Photo: Michael Tropea.



Deep Humanity: The Drawings of Martin Beck

By Diane Thodos

[Editor's Note: This is an excerpt of an interview of Martin Beck by Diane Thodos on the occasion of an exhibition of his work at ARC Gallery in November of 2018.]

"I want my work to reflect the study of the nude form as something that uplifts our experience of being human. This is not prescriptive art and does not have the power to change the world. But it might help spark a quiet revolution in one's own experience."

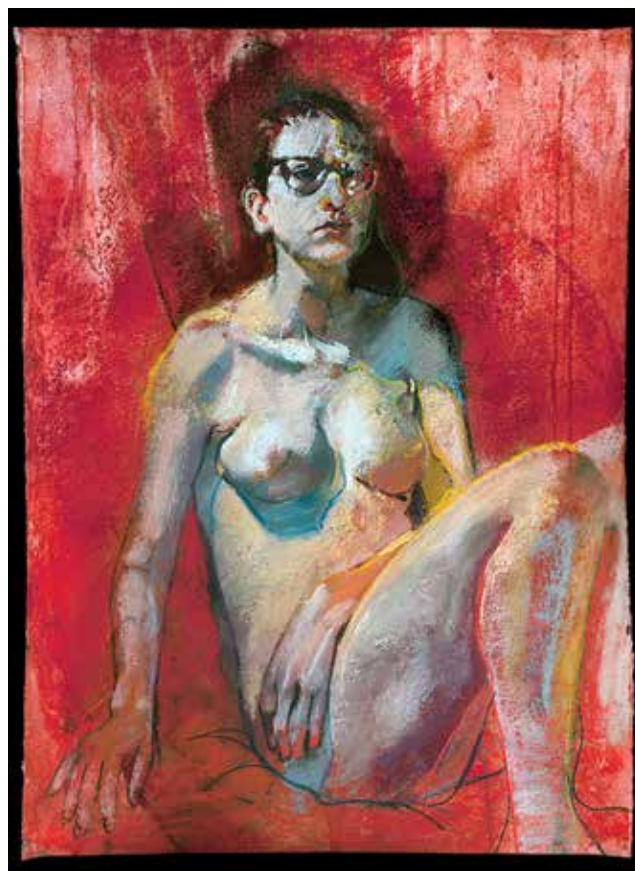
— Martin Beck

As an art critic, I have seen many exhibits that present technologically based conceptual artworks, leaving the viewer detached and uninvolved. The art world seems to have embraced the very alienation and conformity that it once had the courage and self-awareness to challenge.

Discovering the figure drawings of Martin Beck at the ARC Gallery last April came as a welcome surprise. His images of nude figures expressed the exact opposite of postmodernist indifference: consummate skill, bold sincerity, and emotional intensity. Martin Beck's searching eye awakens and animates our human instinct, so long suppressed by our technological environment, to take pleasure and again find interest in the human figure.

Diane Thodos: Can you talk about your materials and technique? How do you start an image? What materials do you use, and how do you build it up?

Martin Beck: I use pastel, acrylic, watercolor and gouache, gum arabic medium, graphite powder, and spray paint. Among my drawing tools are a random orbit sander, a finishing sander, atomizers, and a garden hose. I often start with a drawing—one that I've already done. Usually, I tone the paper with watercolor or gouache, sometimes acrylic. I use spray paint. I'll take it and sand it. I build up these layers of accidental color and mark making. Or I have a simple toned piece of paper—I'll do a drawing on it, I'll stick it on the wall and add more pigment to it by adding pastel dust, smearing colors around, and then do another drawing on top of that. Eventually, I have a result from the session that has enough going for it that I can complete it. I

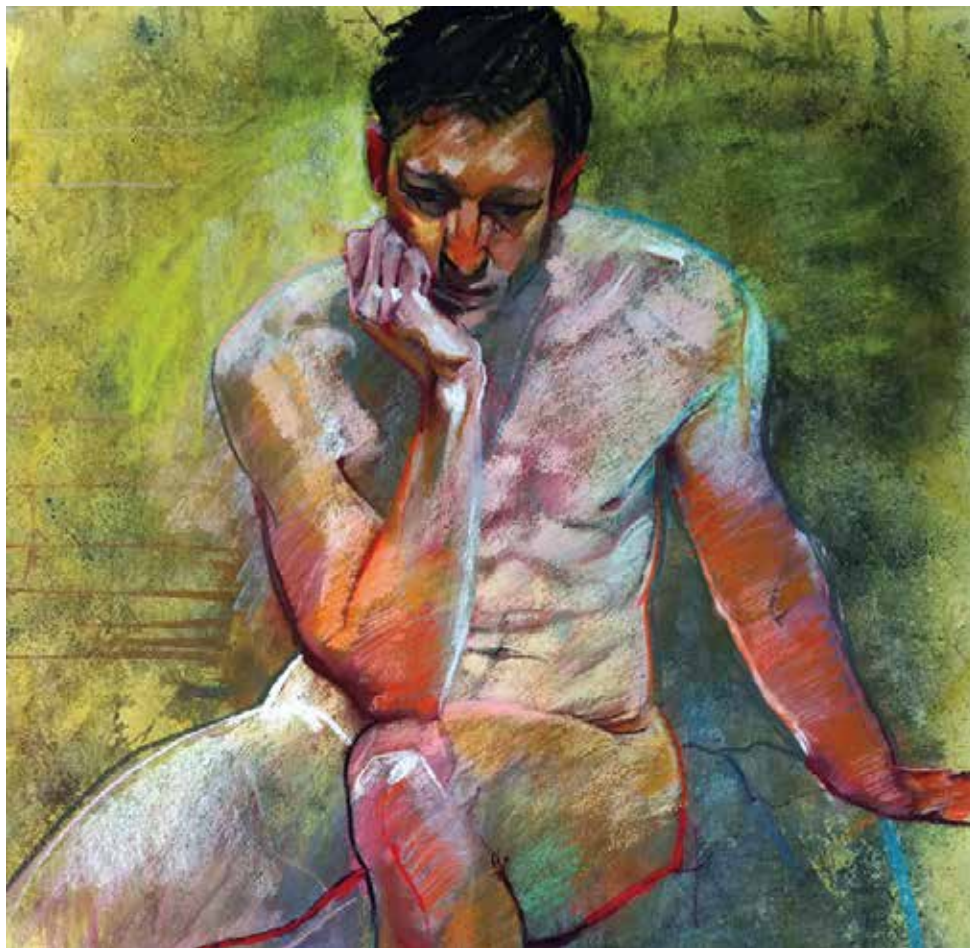


Martin Beck, *Lasting Influence*, 2018. Pastel on prepared paper, 30 3/4 x 22 1/2", Courtesy of the artist.

usually have multiple layers of drawing with some part of the figures revealed and others that are obscured as a palimpsest.

DT: I can feel the sincerity of your intention in the lines, planes, and color modulations flowing from one medium into the next. Your thought processes draw me in and engage me. I feel the condensation of hours of looking at the model in all those elements.

MB: That's all part of the journey. For me, that process feels very much like life, like being alive. Previously, I had been doing large-scale figurative work—that got tiresome after a while with the scale and over-complexity. I wanted a more straightforward, more immediate way of working with the figure. Working from the figure was more life-affirming in a lot of ways.



Martin Beck, *Thinking Man*, 2019. Mixed media on prepared paper 29 1/2 x 29 1/2".
Courtesy of the artist.

DT: When you were a student at the State University of New York at Buffalo and Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, were there particular teachers that influenced you in figure drawing? What did you feel about the educational experience you got?

MB: I studied at SUNY Buffalo (1982—1986) with Harvey Breverman, a printmaker who makes incredible figurative work. I learned a lot from him. At CMU (1990—1992), there weren't many professors there that influenced me—many were too busy pushing me to abandon the figure. I learned a bit from Herb Olds. Pat Bellan-Gillen had some interesting things to say about materials, surface, and color. Elaine King was my strongest influence there, mostly concerning art criticism and issues in contemporary art.

Graduate seminars were awful. They were pushing collaboration, performance, and installation. In many ways, I was self-taught, going to look at art in museums and just doing a lot of drawing. I think it is all about sensitizing yourself to see and being able to let your hand draw what your eyes see. So, once you learn some basic techniques, it is up to you to work at it.

DT: What artists and art traditions do you admire?

MB: Rembrandt, Rubens, and the Renaissance artists interest me. I always loved the Flemish primitives because of the magic realism in their work. Degas has been a significant influence on me in his drawing and his multimedia approach using monoprint, pastels, sculpture, and oil paintings. He was such a technician and a tinkerer. The author of the book *Degas' Method*—Line Clausen Pedersen—called it “radical craftsmanship.”

I like Käthe Kollwitz quite a bit. She has a real immediacy in her drawing and a political sensibility that is very powerful. By contrast, without that human quality and passion in the political artwork made today, the political

message gets diluted. It's the difference between making a statement and living the statement.

DT: The artist witnessing through one's self?

MB: Yes, she was a witness to her time, and her passion came through in her work because she was not trying to invent strategies to communicate. She was communicating directly. She had the skill from her years of drawing to be able to do that effectively.

DT: The skill became a way for her to express and witness her feelings about the sufferings of the poor and their struggles in society. That is why her work has such great authenticity.

MB: It's the authenticity part that really comes through. You can tell that this was her passion. She wasn't distant from her subject or materials. She was hands-on; there was no intermediary there. That time between the wars in Germany is significant to me partially because I have German ancestry and also because of how it reflects our own time. Artists like George Grosz, Otto Dix, and [others in] the Neue Sachlichkeit

[movement] were painters trying to deal with a really horrific social environment: the aftermath of war and the challenges of technology, all of which were changing the face of their society in catastrophic ways. They were struggling with those things in their work. I think that is something we should be doing now....

DT: How does your art address this state of affairs in the art world and the larger society? How does the explosion of conceptual art and deskilling in art teaching diminish connection to the human condition?

MB: I often work in a drawing group, not in isolation. Working in a figure-drawing group together with other people—not alone on a computer—is an important dynamic. We connect with the model. The artists are all very committed and are there every week drawing. I find that studying a person with intensity reaffirms being alive.

DT: The art world is deeply embedded in the use of photography, mass media pop culture, and conceptualism. Many artists use these approaches to “signify” human experiences. What does drawing from life give that sets it apart from these approaches?

MB: You are working with another person. You are not working by yourself using an image or object. You have to work with the other person, and you cannot use the other person. You have to work in collaboration with them to some degree. Starting with the immediacy of figure drawing and working from life gives art liveliness that one does not often see in recent art. I think that liveliness comes from improvising.

There is a difference between composing on a computer and the way a jazz musician would improvise in front of an audience—there are a lot of variables. Drawing from life, it is the same kind of thing—you have to *improvise*. I think there's infinite variation in that....

DT: You mean the way the art witnesses the human presence? For example, how Lucian Freud spent many hours painting a single pose. You feel those

many hours of witnessing imbued the work itself with the deep psychological relationship he had with his models.

MB: Lucian Freud is one of those artists who practiced radical craftsmanship, working for hours on a single pose over many months. Radical craftsmanship is about how far you can push yourself to express the reality, not of making something “look real,” but of the experience of drawing and painting something in that environment.

DT: ...Both you and I were taught that figure drawing was valuable and that artistic intention and depth of expression mattered. Now skill and having a connective emotional reality is being lost, even censored, in art training and education. What do you think has caused this?

MB: I think that mostly it's an economic motivation. It's the fact that if you spend time learning to do something well, there is a lot of labor that goes into it. People are not willing to spend money on that kind of skill anymore. They want to see something that could be a commodity that is easily made and easily explained. A lot of conceptual art can be explained very easily. Think of any political or topical comment that becomes a piece of art composed of objects that were probably fabricated in a factory and thrown together. In some ways that's a lot easier than what I do. It's easy to be clever....

Martin Beck, *June 3, #2*, 2018. Pastel on prepared paper 29 1/2 x 42". Courtesy of the artist.





Martin Beck, *Home Grown #4*, 2018. Mixed media on prepared paper, 29 1/2 x 42".
Courtesy of the artist.

DT: Does conceptual art encourage the artist to have a depersonalized relationship with his or her own artwork and with the audience? A lot of the artists you admire use gesture, mark making, perception, and skill in creating their work: ways of embedding the artists' emotional reality.

MB: I think a good piece of art that is handmade shows the artist's journey. They talk about Degas always struggling to find the form. If you look at his drawings and monoprints he's used a searching or repeated a line until he finds the form. That's a journey you can take with him when you look at the art. Edwin Dickinson is a superlative draftsman: you can SEE him seeing, you can FEEL him seeing, you can FEEL him drawing. That's true for Käthe Kollwitz too. You take part in that experience. When you take a piece of art that's been fabricated, made to order, you don't feel anything. Do you feel the factory worker making it?

DT: Is commercial fabrication a code for the art's salability?

MB: You lose a connection to the artist's journey. Instead, you understand the artist's strategy. You don't feel what the artist feels. You know he is trying to communicate with you, but you don't know if what he's trying to convey is something he thinks or feels. I prefer artists who draw and paint like they mean it—as if it were a matter of life and death.

For a lot of art, it does not seem to matter that it was made or that it's being looked at—as if it were made to go into a collector's or a museum's storage. I don't see people engaging with it. I don't see people looking at it wondering how it was made unless it is a matter of pure scale. One common feature of contemporary art is that it often takes up a lot of space. It's enormous and calls attention to itself. But I'm not sure that it warrants that kind of space and attention.

DT: A spectacular presentation requires space and often uses technology and

extensive fabrication. I see these as attempts to compete with mass-based spectacles. It seems like under the pressure of deskilling, commercialization, and spectacle-oriented strategies, the subjective point of art making has been lost.

MB: The situation is similar to people having jobs that they are not passionate about. Just as assembling pre-made objects is not craft—if a cabinetmaker wants to make a beautiful cabinet, it takes years of apprenticeship. It's not like going out and buying the cheap piece of furniture from IKEA that you put together yourself. We have lost the intensity of inhabiting our work.

This interview in its entirety is available at dianethodos.com/blog.

Diane Thodos is an artist and art critic who lives in Evanston, Illinois. She is the recipient of a Pollock-Krasner Grant in 2002 and has exhibited at the Kouros Gallery in New York City. She is represented by the Traeger/Pinto Gallery in Mexico City and Thomas Masters Gallery in Chicago. For more information, visit www.dianethodos.com

“Implicit Tensions: Mapplethorpe Now”

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York City

by Michel Ségard

There were a number of exhibitions in New York City as well as in other parts of the country commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall uprising. I had the opportunity to visit two of them: the Guggenheim Museum’s “Implicit Tensions: Mapplethorpe Now,” a retrospective of Robert Mapplethorpe’s photographs culled from the museum’s own holdings, and the Leslie-Lohman Museum’s exhibition “Art After Stonewall, 1969–1989.”

This was a bit of an Uptown/Downtown experience. While “After Stonewall” focused on the LGBTQ politics, the Mapplethorpe show made no direct connection to LGBTQ politics since much of his work is so clearly homoerotic. Instead, the exhibition concentrated on Mapplethorpe’s development as an artist.

Organized as a traditional retrospective, the pieces in “Implicit Tensions” fell into five major categories: self-portraits, celebrations of the body, celebrities, flowers, and gay sexuality.

In his self-portraits, Mapplethorpe portrayed himself in various roles. The 1975 piece shows his arm outstretched in a manner vaguely reminiscent of *The Creation of Adam* in the Sistine Chapel. The 1980 portrait, depicting Mapplethorpe bare-chested and with lipstick, makes one think of Rudolph Nureyev. Three years later, in 1983, he portrayed himself as an old-time gangster in a formal shirt and leather coat with an old-fashioned machine gun, standing in front of an inverted star. Two years later and he was the devil (complete with horns). This sequence ends with his final self-portrait from 1988, which shows him holding a staff topped with a skull. He was to die of AIDS the following year. From these works, it is clear that Mapplethorpe found roleplaying an important part of his aesthetics. In this respect, his work is more akin to that of Cindy Sherman than to that of his contemporary Andy Warhol.

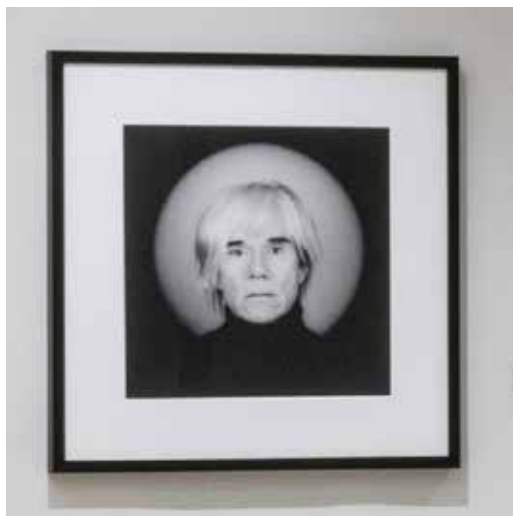


Upper Left: Robert Mapplethorpe, *Self Portrait*, 1980.

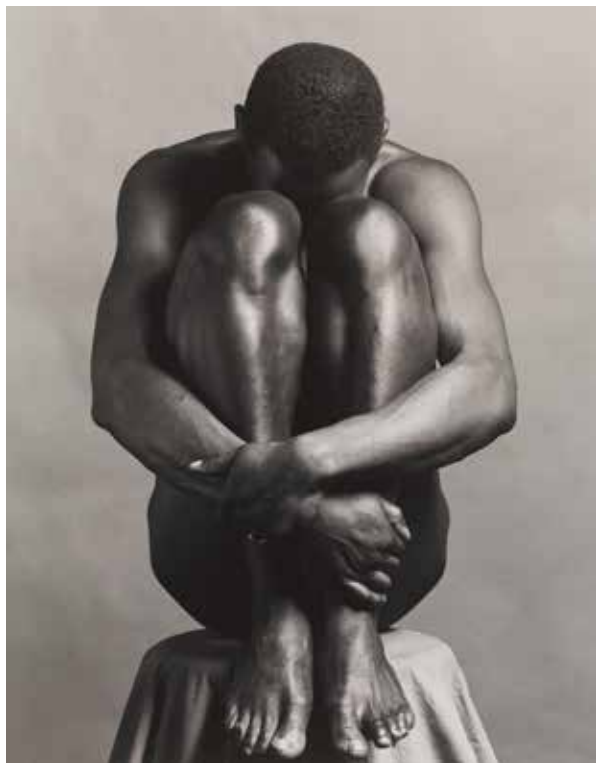
Upper Right: Robert Mapplethorpe, *Self Portrait*, 1988.

Lower Left: Robert Mapplethorpe, *Andy Warhol*, 1986.

Lower Right: Robert Mapplethorpe, *Laurie Anderson*, 1987.



Details of installation views: “Implicit Tensions: Mapplethorpe Now,” Guggenheim Museum, New York. Photos: David Heald.



Robert Mapplethorpe, *Ajitto*, 1981. First image of a quadriptych. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Gift, The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation 95.4322 © Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation. Used by permission.

After the self-portraits came a group of portraits of (mostly) art celebrities. His 1976 portrait of David Hockney lounging on a bench in Fire Island with curator Henry Geldzahler sitting alongside him is uncharacteristic. In this piece, he positions his subjects in poses that mirror the surrounding architecture, giving a certain ironic or mocking tone to the piece. Usually, Mapplethorpe's portraits contain no distinct background.

More characteristic are his 1986 portrait of Andy Warhol and a 1987 portrait of Laurie Anderson. Here there is no backdrop; the faces emerge from the blackness. Alluding to his Catholicism, Warhol's face is surrounded with a mandala of white light in his portrait, giving Warhol a semi-religious bearing—again a return to role playing.

Mapplethorpe also devoted a lot of time to photographing the “body beautiful” in the early 1980s. Four pieces from this effort stand out. *Ajitto* from 1981 is a quadriptych which portrays a black nude male on a pedestal, knees to his chest and head bowed, in a pose that the wall label suggests is taken from 19th century paintings. The wall label also states that the images

Highly Personal

South African Artists

Hasan and Husain Essop

David Goldblatt

Pieter Hugo

Donna Kukama

Terry Kurgan

Senzeni Marasela

Nandipha Mntambo

Zanele Muholi

Cedric Nunn

Jo Ractliffe

Mikhael Subotzky

Andrew Tshabangu



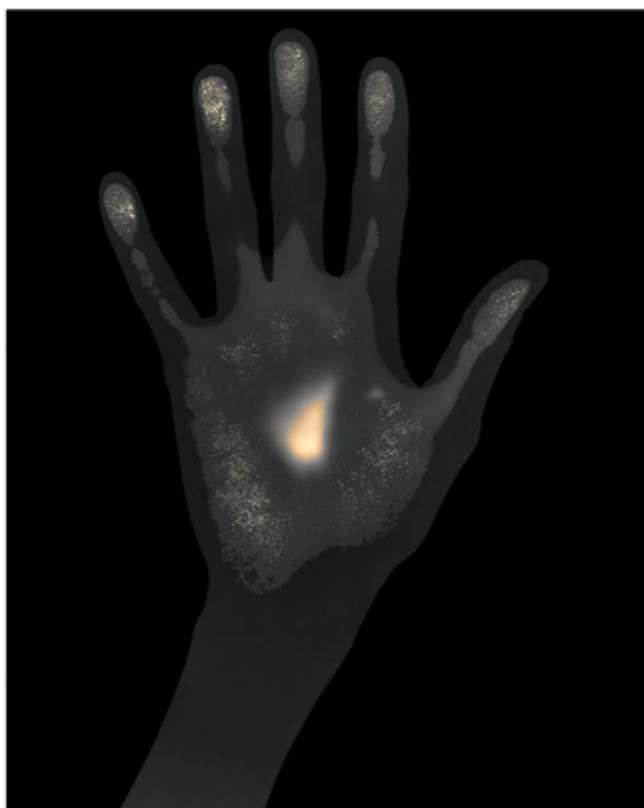
Donna Kukama, *Se Sa Feleng... (3)*, 2012
Courtesy of the artist and blank projects

suggest “the commodification of black bodies during slavery,” one of the few overtly political assertions in the documentation of this exhibition. Taken with other images of black men and this model, I think Mapplethorpe’s message is more simply that black is beautiful. That message is reinforced by *Ken Moody and Robert Sherman* from 1984 and *Ken and Tyler* from 1985. In these two pieces the message is expanded to include and dramatically illustrate the position that black and white are equally beautiful. Strangely, the wall label for these pieces only mentions the “the nuanced tonal range, velvety texture, and matte surface finish made possible with platinum printing.”

The other “body beautiful” piece that caught my eye was a 1982 piece, *Lisa Lyon*. Lisa Lyon was the first Women’s World Pro Bodybuilding champion. In this photo, she strikes a “muscle” pose with her left leg forward and wears a long, white veil over her head. The first thing that becomes apparent in this piece is how similar her pose is to those in the later work *Ken and Tyler*. Taken together, these two works subtly speak to women’s equality.



Robert Mapplethorpe, *Ken and Tyler*, 1985. Platinum-palladium print, Guggenheim Museum, New York. Gift, The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation 96.4373. © Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation. Used by permission.



Gary Schneider, *Donna Kukama*, 2013

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Robert Mapplethorpe, *Rose with Smoke*, 1985. Detail of installation view: "Implicit Tensions: Mapplethorpe Now," Guggenheim Museum, New York. Photo: David Heald.

In discussing the images of Lyon in the exhibition, the wall label acknowledges this stance in an awkwardly academic manner by stating, "Lyon inhabits and complicates stereotypes of femininity to present a vision of empowerment."

The other two categories, flowers and gay sexuality, could be thought of as one. After all, flowers are the hermaphroditic sex organs of plants. Moreover, the categories were shown in adjacent areas of the exhibition Mapplethorpe himself noted the similarity, as quoted in one of the wall labels: "My approach to photographing a flower is not much different than photographing a cock. Basically, it's the same thing.... It's the same vision." This is seen in *Rose with Smoke* from 1985. It has an erotic undertone accentuated by the smoke in the background and suggesting a tabooed hideaway. The 1988 composition *Poppy* is almost phallic in nature, as the stems of the two flowers jut out horizontally into the square of the picture. This equivalence in Mapplethorpe's mind is confirmed in *Dennis Speight*. Done in 1983, the photo's eponymous nude model holds five calla lilies upright in his fists while his detumescent phallus is in shadow beneath them.

Finally, there are the phallogentric photos which concentrate on gay leather and S&M. It is this category of Mapplethorpe photos that caused an uproar in Cincinnati when the city's Contemporary Arts Center exhibited some in 1990. Director Dennis Barrie and the museum were charged with criminal obscenity, and a number of corporations withdrew their sponsorship of the museum. Eventually both Barrie and the museum were found not guilty on all charges.

American society continues to have difficulty with the depiction of overt sexuality, especially if it is not heterosexual. Even in this exhibition, these pieces were set aside in their own room. One of the most famous from this series is *Man in Polyester Suit* from 1980. The black male subject poses in a cheap polyester suit, his face cropped out of the image which centers on his torso. His exposed semi-tumescent penis protrudes out of his open fly. The piece alludes to stereotypical associations with regard to black masculinity, the relationship between masculinity and aggression, and the homosexual obsession with the phallus and its objectification. *Mark Stevens (Mr. 10 ½)* (1976), naked except for leather chaps that showcase his genitalia, and *Patrice* (1977), dressed only in an elastic jockstrap and leather jacket, reinforce the theme of phallus worship. But all these images can be viewed as social commentary and not merely as titillating homoerotic imagery. They advocate the legitimacy of gay sexuality even if it contains unorthodox practices.

There is no guilt in any of Mapplethorpe's images. They challenge the commodification and branding espoused by his contemporaries like Sherman, Warhol and the postmodernists by adhering to traditional, rigorous aesthetic principles. For example, his insistence on using the difficult platinum-palladium photo-printing technique to bring out tonal subtlety contrasts starkly with Warhol's casual silkscreening strategy or Basquiat's street tagger approach. As this exhibition makes clear, Mapplethorpe was an artist with a contemporary, radical message conveyed via exacting technical refinement and an uncompromising aesthetic.

In this show, Mapplethorpe's political messages were secondary. Rather, it was designed to secure his place in the pantheon of great technical and aesthetic masters—and it succeeded.

"Implicit Tensions: Mapplethorpe Now," part one, was on view from January 25 through July 10, 2019.

Michel Ségard is the Editor in Chief of the New Art Examiner. He is the author of numerous exhibition catalog essays. Before retiring, he was the curator of KPMG's Chicago art collection. He was also an adjunct assistant professor at the School of the Art Institute, where he taught for 11 years.

"After Stonewall, 1969-1989"

Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art

by Michel Ségard

"After Stonewall: 1969-1989" commemorates the Stonewall Uprising of 1969 and expresses through art the LGBTQ politics that emerged thereafter. The exhibition was large enough that it had to be shown in two venues. Chronologically, the Leslie-Lohman Museum housed the first half of the show, which concentrated on the "coming out" of LGBTQ rights in the 1970s. The second half of the show, located at the Grey Art Gallery of New York University, dealt more with the politics in the 1980s that surrounded the AIDS epidemic.

The political tone of the first half of the exhibition was set by Ellen Turner's *The White Out of a Daycare Demonstration*, one of the first pieces in the show. The painting depicts an event during a 1973 demonstration in New York against planned cutbacks to childcare funding, ergo the whiteout of parts of the painting. Working women of New York City were fighting for social justice, and the LGBTQ liberation movement was part of that struggle.

But not all LGBTQ artists live in New York. Delmas Howe's *The Three Graces* from 1978 shows how LGBTQ artists outside of major urban centers found ways of expressing themselves. Raised in rural New Mexico, Howe created a series of paintings called the *Rodeo Pantheon Series*, of which this piece was the first. Three well muscled, bare chested young farmers stand in a row, arms on each other's shoulders. His work makes one think of Paul Cadmus in its clandestine

Judy Chicago, *Test Plate for Virginia Woolf* from *The Dinner Party*, 1978. Glazed porcelain. Detail of installation view courtesy of the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art.



Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, *Allegory of the Stonewall Riot (Statue of Liberty) Fighting for Drag Queen, Husband and Home*, 1969. Courtesy of the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art.

homoeroticism. Over time, much of his art has come to depict male homosexual feeling directly, and that has become his primary focus.

Test Plate for Virginia Woolf from *The Dinner Party* by Judy Chicago returned to the feminist aspects of this part of the exhibition. A friend and contemporary of Howe (she also lives in New Mexico), Chicago's *The Dinner Party* is her best-known work and one of the most famous emblems of the '70s feminist movement. This piece is an abstraction of female genitalia and obliquely references Woolf's love affair with Victoria Mary Sackville-West while also mirroring forms found in the flower paintings of Georgia O'Keeffe.

One of the earliest pieces in the show from 1969 is *Allegory of the Stonewall Riot (Statue of Liberty) Fighting for Drag Queen, Husband and Home* by Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt. He was actually inside the Stonewall the night the uprising occurred. This piece expresses his aspirations for liberty, marriage, and acceptance that the LGBTQ community is finally beginning to enjoy.

A surprise in the show was David Hockney's large portrait of the drag performer Divine. Done in 1979, it is



David Hockney, *Divine*, 1979. Acrylic on canvas. Detail of installation view courtesy of the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art.



Robert Mapplethorpe, *Louise Bourgeois*, 1982. Silver gelatin print. Courtesy of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation.



Frank Moore, *Weed*, 1989. Oil on canvas with glass eyes, with wood frame covered with white Madagascar mica with cast plaster and wood gilded ornaments. Detail of installation view courtesy of the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art.

uncharacteristic of his photo-based work and borrows a little from Matisse with a hint of the great British painter Francis Bacon. The piece alludes to the gender bending trend of the 1970s and '80s, such as in John Waters' camp 1972 movie, *Pink Flamingos*, in which *Divine* starred, and the gender ambiguous costumes of some of the '80s rock groups like Queen.

Continuing the theme of gender ambiguity, E.K. Waller contributed a pair of photographs documenting the Natalie Barney Collective, a Los Angeles women's group from the 1970s. In one photograph the women are dressed in romanticized female attire; in the other some are dressed in men's clothing. Here, the stereotypes of femininity and lesbian identity are lampooned.

This half of the exhibition closes with a 1982 portrait of Louise Bourgeois by Robert Mapplethorpe. Bourgeois holds under her arm one of her noted sculptures, *Fillette* (French for little girl). The sculpture is

decidedly phallic even though Bourgeois is on the record as having denied that intent. Yet she is smirking in the portrait and is quoted in the accompanying wall label as saying that Mapplethorpe was "famous for his objectionable sexual representation... and this photograph fitted in his album."

This first part of "After Stonewall" gives equal time to and does justice to the lesbian community. Some of the other exhibitions this year on this theme have fallen short, especially regarding their political activism. It also does a good job of recording the slow and varied process of the LGBTQ community coming out that took place in the 1970s. There is a joy and a sense of freedom about this part of the exhibit.

The other half of this exhibit at the Grey Art Gallery is not so upbeat. The 1980s saw the emergence of the AIDS epidemic, which infused the LGBTQ community with anxiety and anger.

Marc Lida, *Grace Jones at The Saint*, 1982. Watercolor on paper. Detail of installation view courtesy of the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art.

Gran Fury, *The Government Has Blood on Its Hands*, 1988. Offset lithograph. Courtesy of the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art.



This atmosphere of uncertainty is subtly captured in David Armstrong's 1983 photographic portrait *Stephen Tashjian (Tabboo!)*. Tashjian is an artist and drag performer who goes by the name of Tabboo! Tashjian himself captured this anxious mood in his portrait, *Mark Morrisroe*. Done in 1985, the figure's expression hints at the loss of the optimism of the previous decade. A fragment of the U.S. flag's star field in the corner also suggests the disappointment of a lost dream.

Still, life goes on. Marc Lida was an artist and social worker for AIDS service organizations. In his *Grace Jones at the Saint* watercolor from 1982, he captures the continued energy of New York nightlife even in the face of the epidemic. Note the couple embracing in the lower right and the man next to them with a somber expression.

But in this decade, AIDS eventually dominates the personal, social, political, and artistic life of the LGBTQ community. Especially notable were the works of Gran Fury, the graphic propaganda arm of ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power). *The Government Has Blood on Its Hands* from 1988 is one of many posters wheatpasted all across New York City in its effort to bring awareness of the neglect of the AIDS epidemic by government agencies.

Frank Moore had a more personal way of expressing his frustration with the AIDS epidemic. His 1989 painting *Weed* shows a hand grasping a plant with 20 bright blue flowers that has just been yanked out of the

ground. Each flower has a glass eye for its center. In the background a stairway leads to ghostly outlines of skyscrapers. Are the flowers symbols of friends he has lost to the epidemic, untimely plucked out of existence?

Even when not in major urban areas, AIDS resonated in the art of LGBTQ artists. Lesbian and feminist art pioneer Maxine Fine left New York City for rural New Mexico in the 1980s, and yet, her work *Landscape with Grey Sky* from 1987 echoes the grief felt throughout the community. This semi-abstract painting depicts a rain of humanoid forms falling from the sky in a desert-like scene. The sense of loss is palpable.

Unlike the Mapplethorpe exhibition, "Implicit Tensions", at the Guggenheim Museum, the artistic proficiency of the participating artists is not the major focus of "Art After Stonewall." It is the artists' social and political content that takes center stage. The show documents those rollercoaster emotions of the 1970s and '80s as it poignantly chronicles a defining epoch in the history of America's LGBTQ community.

"After Stonewall, 1969-1989" was on view at both the Leslie-Lohman Museum and the Grey Art Gallery of New York University from April 24 through July 20, 2019.

Michel Ségard is the Editor in Chief of the New Art Examiner. He is the author of numerous exhibition catalog essays. Before retiring, he was the curator of KPMG's Chicago art collection. He was also an adjunct assistant professor at the School of the Art Institute, where he taught for 11 years.

David Armstrong, *Stephen Tashjian (Tabboo!)*, 1983. Silver gelatin print. Detail of installation view courtesy of the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art.



Tabboo! (Stephen Tashjian), *Mark Morrisroe*, 1985. Acrylic on canvas. Detail of installation view courtesy of the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art and Gordon Robichaux.



Maxine Fine, *Landscape with Grey Sky*, 1987. Detail of installation view courtesy of the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art.



DETROIT VIEWS

"Landlord Colors" Show Full of Provocative Works

by K.A. Letts

Like politics, all art is local. But the most consequential art achieves universality through the particular circumstances of its creation.

In "Landlord Colors: On Art, Economy, and Materiality," Cranbrook Art Museum curator Laura Mott, along with collaborators Taylor Renee Aldridge of the journal *ARTS.BLACK* and Ryan Meyers-Johnson of Sidewalk Detroit, make a convincing argument that contemporary Detroit artists who have synthesized their unique, place-specific art from the substance of a distressed city have earned membership in an exclusive club of similarly inspired artists from around the world. Specifically, Mott argues, Detroit artists, many from the Cass Corridor movement of Detroit in the '70s, share important inspirations, material strategies and methods with artists from other cities in economic, political or social upheaval. The historic stresses and sorrows of Detroit, Athens, Turin, Seoul and Havana have made their way into the work of artists through unique materials derived from those locales. The curators have

coined the term "landlord colors" (cheap and undesirable paint colors used in rental apartments) to describe the "overarching material conditions enveloping the city—a situation not of its own choosing."

The main venue for "Landlord Colors" is the Cranbrook Art Museum, although installations and related performances extend throughout the city. It begins with a splash and a crash. The splash is provided by Cuban artist Reynier Leyva Novo, whose colorful tapestry *Untitled (Immigrants)* hangs at the entrance of the exhibit. The tapestry is composed of used clothing, which was donated by recently arrived Cuban refugees in Miami's Little Havana. Novo then returned the materials to Havana, where community workers fabricated the scraps into an oversized 16' x 16' textile reminiscent of the welcome mats inside many Cuban homes. Nearby, an imaginary crash comes from shattering plaster in Arte Povera conceptual artist Giulio Paolini's work *L'altra figura*. Paolini's identical pair of classical plaster busts, which look down on the remains of a third, represent the artist's reflection on the fragility of a culture under attack by domestic terrorism and at war with itself during the Years of Lead in Italy (1968-1988).

"Landlord Colors" abounds with provocative, visually satisfying pairings of works that echo and amplify each other and emphasize points of correspondence among the artists that resonate throughout the exhibition.

Addie Langford's beautiful, post-minimalist painting *BR Blue/#1 /LU* features rows of inky brush strokes painted on the back of scavenged automotive interior upholstery fabric. The effect is incongruously elegant. Nearby, *Umber-Blue* by South Korean painter and political activist Yun Hyong-Keun makes a powerful visual argument for the ongoing influence of the South Korean Dansaekwha movement, with its formal, monochromatic aesthetic and reliance on found industrial materials.

Brenda Goodman's three comic yet sinister figures (*Self Portraits #1, #3, and #4*) silently occupy the center of the first gallery. These plainly female, nearly featureless, cone-shaped apparitions are made using

Giulio Paolini, *L'altra figura* (foreground); Reynier Leyva Novo, *Untitled (Immigrants)* (background). Landlord Colors installation.





Brenda Goodman, *Self Portraits #1, #3 and #4* (foreground); Addie Langford, *BR Blue/#1/LU* (background). Landlord Colors installation.

materials scavenged by the artist from her urban environment. Although the sculptures were completed in 1977, art history has mischievously added a layer of unintended but unmistakable meaning to the figures, as they bring to mind veiled Muslim women.

Three chairs of different provenance and intent stand at the entrance to the next gallery. They represent a continuum of material and method: the cardboard, paper, glue and wood chair recently completed by students in the Pontiac elementary schools replicates a project created 50 years earlier by Neapolitan children according to instructions from Italian architect and designer Riccardo Dalisi. More recently, Detroit designer Chris Schanck has employed the labor of his Detroit neighbors to create his *Alufoil Chair*. The armature of his free-form design is made of industrial materials covered with aluminum foil and then coated in resin. The adjacent chair, created by Arte Povera artist Marisa Merz, is made of aluminum. It is a fragment of the immersive installation that the artist created in the apartment she shared with her daughter and her husband, fellow artist Mario Merz.

After the intimacy of the chair series, the gallery around the corner opens the view with a gargantuan

seascape by Cuban artist Yoan Capote. At first glance, *Island* (see-escape) seems fairly conventional, but then you notice that embedded in the waves are over 500,000 rusty fishhooks, Capote's evocation of the pain of isolation on an impoverished island. In front of *Island* stands what might be my favorite piece of the show, *Porcelain Legs in the Posture of David*. Detroit artist Kylie Lockwood, a virtuoso craftsman, has cast her own feet and legs in delicately tinted porcelain, the pale sheen of her toenails contrasting with the fleshy warmth of feet and legs. The limbs rest on a plaster plinth that emerges from translucent plastic. Maybe it's the effect of the seascape in the background, but it put me in mind less of Michelangelo's *David* and more of a ruined sculptural version of Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*.

In the next gallery, Mott has cleverly paired Scott Hocking's vintage found photo of piled-up buffalo skulls (and accompanying black-tinted bony cow cranium) with Michelangelo Pistoletto's equally intriguing mountain of rags, half brightly colored, half white, and bisected by a mirror. It is a subtle comment on the fact that perceptions of color and whiteness depend on where you are standing.

In the adjoining gallery, Detroit artist Matthew Angelo Harrison has adapted the skills he employed as a clay prototype sculptor for Ford Motor Company by engineering his own hand-made 3D printers that, in turn, produce low resolution replicas of African historical artifacts. Thus, he neatly employs elements of the post-industrial automotive design process to comment on African cultural heritage removed from its historical context and the black American experience.

One of my favorite pairings in "Landlord Colors" is of Barbara Harris and Al Loving. Both artists are native Detroiters, but Loving departed for New York in 1968, where he made his name as a painter of hard-edged geometry. His rejection of that aesthetic in the early '70s with the work shown here—unstretched, pieced and dyed canvas—is in fruitful dialog with Barbara Harris's recent fiber work. Harris's *In a Silent Way* combines the syntax of African American quilt-making with her unique staining, rusting, burning process to create a visually and spiritually satisfying distillation of black urban experience.

It would be tempting to merely recite the names and descriptions of all the remarkable artists in "Landlord Colors," both from Detroit and elsewhere, but space doesn't permit that sort of exposition. Important Detroit artists like Gilda Snowden, Allie McGhee,

Tiff Massey, Tyree Guyton, Michael Luchs and Charles McGee are represented here, and if the work shown isn't necessarily representative of the broad substance of their output, it does name-check them for further investigation. Most importantly, through careful editing and thoughtful installation, Mott and her fellow curators have created a convincing narrative that places Detroit artists within the context of a global movement of transcendent art created from extreme hardship.

And "Landlord Colors" doesn't stop at the walls of Cranbrook Art Museum. "Material Detroit," an extended citywide series of performances, conversations and installations, expands and amplifies the themes in the Cranbrook exhibit. The offsite offerings will continue through October of 2019.

I have not seen all of the performances, and some of them will not have occurred before this review goes to press. But I will mention a couple of the most remarkable offerings here. Scott Hocking's *Bone Black*, an installation near Detroit's waterfront, is a dreamlike vision of discarded boats that seem to float, suspended, from the ceiling of an abandoned warehouse, ghosts of Detroit's once prosperous economy. *Iron Teaching Rocks How to Rust* by Olayami Dabls is an outdoor installation located near his iconic MBad Bead Museum. The Bead Museum also features a new, intimate gallery where the elegant textiles, drawings and ceramics of Elizabeth Youngblood are on view. Near Eastern Market, Anders Ruhwald, creator of monumental ceramics and installation artist, has created an uncanny environment of charred wood, black vessels, vertiginous rooms and overlooks in his installation *Unit 1: 3583 Dubois*.

"Landlord Colors" is an ambitious effort to place Detroit's artists in a global context through their shared use of material, and in this, the curators have succeeded. However, it should be acknowledged that in

motivation, outlook, and ideology, the artists featured in "Landlord Colors" are as different as they are the same.

The Dansaekwha artists show a particularly satisfying visual relationship with the post-minimalist paintings chosen for the exhibit, but one could argue that artists in post-World War II South Korea viewed their work as a rejection of the formal constrictions of traditional Asian art and a turning toward Western values, rather than as a critique of political repression, racism, materialism or any other Western -ism as addressed by Detroit's artists. And while Detroit artists adapted the detritus of a post-industrial manufacturing milieu to their own purposes by necessity, Italian artists of the Arte Povera movement chose to employ non-traditional materials as a rejection of tired, traditional European assumptions about art production. The most persuasive correspondences overall, it seems to me, are between the Cuban artists and artists from Detroit, who share preoccupations with race, social isolation and poverty.

The disasters and catastrophes which have afflicted the countries represented in "Landlord Colors" are varied: political repression (on both the left and right), economic collapse, domestic terrorism, and racism. What remains constant is the resilience and creativity of the artists in each environment. They acknowledge their trying circumstances even as they rise above them, employing the materials at hand to make art that speaks to a global audience.

"Landlord Colors" is on view from June 22 to October 6, 2019 at the Cranbrook Art Museum.

K.A. Letts is a working artist (kalettsart.com) and art blogger (rustbeltarts.com). She has shown her paintings and drawings in galleries and museums in Toledo, Detroit, Chicago and New York. She writes frequently about art in the Detroit area.

(L to R) Riccardo Dalisi for the series *Throne*, *Chair* (1973); Chris Schanck, *ALUchair* (2019); Marisa Merz (from *Living Sculpture*) *Sedia* (1966). Landlord Colors installation.



REVIEWS

Tetsuya Noda: Soft and Simple Depth

Spring Group Exhibition at the Andrew Bae Gallery

Underneath the clanging Brown Line tracks lies the Andrew Bae Gallery, a haven from the crowded city streets. One of River North's iconic contemporary art spaces, the gallery is an important site for both up-and-coming and established Asian artists who merge traditional artistic techniques with bold new ideas. A recent group exhibition featured some of the gallery's most innovative and boundary-pushing artists, offering viewers a wide range of aesthetics, materials and topics. One artist particularly stood out for his fusion of mediums and subtle humor: Tetsuya Noda.

Considered one of the world's most innovative contemporary printmakers, Tetsuya Noda has achieved international fame. His work is held in prominent collections and has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions, including an upcoming show at the Art Institute of Chicago in spring 2020. Despite his global recognition, Noda has long been a staple of the Chicago art scene. The Andrew Bae Gallery has displayed Noda's work for almost 30 years since opening its doors in 1990.

The understated and peaceful environment of the gallery may not reflect Noda's celebrity, but it certainly provides the perfect setting for his intimate and

intricate work. His works are hung separately from the rest of the group, in a private space that requires visitors to view each creation up close.

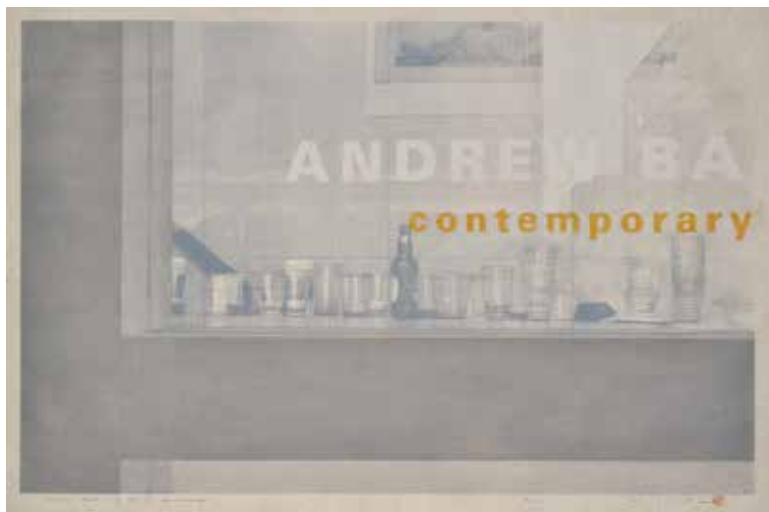
At first glance, one might think Noda's works are conventional photographs, so real and complex is each image. However, there is also an inexplicable element of abstraction, from the blurred shapes to the odd coloration. In many works, there is also a graphic quality reminiscent of sketches. In fact, Noda's work embraces both of these artistic methods, as well as a third—printmaking. His process has been perfected over 50 years and begins with photography, which is translated into Japanese woodblock printmaking and screen printing. The final product is put together and duplicated using his mimeograph machine. This is what makes his work so unique—and so complex that other artists have refused to use his painstaking methods.

While his technical approach is difficult, Noda's subject matter is far simpler. He photographs the scenes around him as they occur naturally. As a result, his work often features gifts from his friends, like bouquets of flowers or bushels of vegetables, or intimate moments in the life of his family. And nothing summarizes the nature of Noda's work better than the title of his series, which he has used since he began his practice 50 years ago: *Diary*. For Noda, each work is an entry in his life-long artistic journal.

One of the oldest works on display is *194 Diary; Mar 3rd '77*. This picture contrasts the familiar household surroundings with ghostly figures spinning through the room. However, the story behind the image—of Noda's children dancing to music in a family friend's home—is charming. It invites the viewer to enter into Noda's life and memories. At the same time, by blurring the children's faces, Noda encourages his audience to project their own experiences into this image.

Tetsuya Noda, *194 Diary; Mar 3rd '77*, 1977. Woodcut and silkscreen print. 17.5 x 25.25 in.
Image courtesy of Andrew Bae Gallery.





Tetsuya Noda, *452 Diary; Sept. 10th '06*, 2006. Woodcut and silkscreen print, 23.5 x 36.75 in. Image courtesy of Andrew Bae Gallery.

Though personal and intimate, Noda's scenes are simultaneously universal.

While motion is a feature of *194 Diary* and some of his other older works, many of his recent compositions highlight naturally occurring still lifes. Noda imbues these scenes of stillness with a sense of time and movement in poignant ways, as in *452 Diary; Sept. 10th '06*. A centerpiece of the exhibition, this work depicts the aftermath of Noda's 2006 solo exhibition at the Andrew Bae Gallery. Wine glasses—remnants of crowds passing through hours before—have been left in neat stacks along the windowsill beneath the gallery sign. Through layers of ink, Noda transforms this scene of waste into a singular moment of serenity, a touching scene of clean-up and contemplation after the excitement of an opening.

Many of Noda's works lack vibrant color, a choice he makes as he adapts photographs into prints. However, that does not mean he omits color. Instead, Noda explores relationships between colors, employing various shades to achieve the delicate look he desires. In *452 Diary*, for instance, he layers whites upon whites and grays upon grays to emphasize the subtle differences in the colors we encounter every day.

Occasionally, Noda does venture into the realm of color, approaching the issue with bold originality. One of the most intriguing works on view is *450 Diary; Feb 12 '06*, depicting a bouquet of flowers. Embracing this traditionally beautiful subject matter, Noda uses color to find new ways to examine the loveliness of the scene. Rather than

embracing the original orientation of colors, Noda switches the shades, making the flowers and leaves gray and white and transforming the background into a vibrant yellow. The flowers maintain their complex shading and gradation yet appear colorless against the bright backdrop. This reversal reveals hidden details in the flowers and offers a new way of viewing these everyday objects.

While the show only includes a sampling of Noda's work, it nevertheless illustrates the genius of his artistry and skill as a printmaker. The subjects and themes may be quotidian—in fact, as a diary of Noda's life, one would expect no less. Yet through their very ordinariness, these works become relatable and personable. Through Noda's complex process of transformation and recreation, these objects take on new significance and uncover hidden beauty. This show is truly both a sensory and serene experience, one that awakens a new perspective on the seemingly unremarkable moments in our lives

By Emelia Lehmann

"Tetsuya Noda: *World According to Tetsuya Noda*" was on view at the Andrew Bae Gallery, Chicago, from March 1 through March 30 of 2019.

Emelia Lehmann is a recent graduate of the University of Chicago and an aspiring arts professional. An avid writer and researcher, she loves exploring the incredible arts and cultural opportunities in Chicago.

Tetsuya Noda, *450 Diary; Feb. 12th '06*, 2006. Woodcut and silkscreen print, 10 x 20 in. Image courtesy of Andrew Bae Gallery.



“Figures of Speech” Probes Junction of Art and Design

Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago

In his first museum exhibition, “Figures of Speech,” Virgil Abloh has taken over the MCA with a bold display of work at the intersection of art and design. Intersectionality is a huge topic as we settle into the 21st century. The rigid boundaries that are used to classify abstract concepts are being chiseled away. Abloh’s playful yet provocative work contributes to that project.

“Figures of Speech” uses the model of language to interrogate the fixity of definitions. Abloh recognizes that, while a word or phrase can have a surface meaning, it can also mean several different things depending on the context. The meanings of some words have grown to be both figurative and precise. Abloh is leaning into this ambiguity by taking the position of both an artistic “purist” and a “tourist.” This allows viewers to approach the work from both sides of the spectrum of art appreciation and be confronted with that position as it shifts throughout the exhibition.

As a fashion designer and current artistic director of Louis Vuitton, Abloh has been instrumental in the crossover of streetwear and high fashion. His designs are political, confrontational, exuberant, and unapologetically self-promoting. He embraces the hype as well as the hate. A rug is printed with a criticism of his first brand, Pyrex: “It’s highly possible Pyrex simply bought a bunch of Rugby flannels, slapped ‘PYREX 23’ on the back, and resold them for an astonishing markup of 700%.” This is funny because it is probably true.

Abloh is not interested in reinventing the wheel. He instead takes a 3% approach to his designs, meaning he is only interested in making a 3% change to an original. The creative process is explained in a small book of a lecture Abloh gave at Harvard University two years ago. *Insert Complicated Title Here* is a simple and well-designed little volume that outlines a few short-cuts for future artists and designers to consider as they discover their own processes.

Abloh also emphasizes the importance of mentors. Abloh’s mentors are both living and dead. He cites Duchamp and references a myriad of Renaissance artists. Having grown up in Chicago, Abloh can also be connected to the playful approach and generosity



Virgil Abloh, “Figures of Speech.” Installation view, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago.

of the Chicago Imagists. The Imagists were interested in making work that broke away from the restraints of academic art. Although Abloh does not expressly name the Imagists as influential, they too were inspired by art found in the everyday. This created a style that is accessible to a gamut of viewers by being vibrant and often humorous.

For the purist art goer, the work makes many heavy-handed references to art history. Caravaggio’s *Entombment of Christ* is used repeatedly on t-shirts, hoodies and packaging. By introducing Renaissance artists into streetwear, Abloh is chipping at the boundaries of where fine art is seen. The exhibition isn’t for the average MCA visitor. Instead, it strives in some ways to make that purist feel like a tourist.

“Figures of Speech” refers to the malleability of language. By using language and quotations, Abloh can convey something specific and precise while also implying something else. The quotations he has chosen are ironic and humorous. While explaining his technique, for example, Abloh says, “That’s literally the point of that tool—to insert humanity through conversation. You open up when you laugh.” Part of the tourist/purist theme is to allow viewers the space to enter the work from any background.

The exhibition has a collaborative aspect that speaks to the designer in Abloh. The installation space, for instance, is designed by Samir Bantal and organized by MCA Chief Curator Michael Darling. The show

includes work from throughout his career, which began when Abloh started designing album art, concert staging, and merchandise for Kanye West. Appropriately, a giant-sized Kanye West CD occupies one of the galleries.

The sheer amount on display is impressive, as most of the work was created in 2019. At times, you feel like you are walking through the artist's sketchbook. In some pieces, the viewer is confronted directly. In others the viewer is invited to interact. In this way, the exhibition is a bit chaotic. And there must be about 10 pieces of blacked-out billboards. The symbolism is powerful but loses its effectiveness with the repetition.

Donald Judd's famous quote, "Design has to work, art does not," is taken to heart in Abloh's vision. Commercial art is geared towards the final product—a brand—a means of making profit and discovering (or orchestrating) the next thing before that brand becomes obsolete. Art, with the capital A, is more fluid in nature. While it is also geared toward discovering and orchestrating the next thing, the focus need not only be on the final product but can also include the process. Abloh is sharing his journey, including those processes, and reflecting upon the last 20 years with a positive attitude.

Abloh's work pokes fun at criticism and speaks truth to power. Neon words illuminate a darkened gallery, stating, "*You're obviously in the wrong place.*" This is a phrase most people of color have heard at least once in their lives. Standing in front of this confrontational sign are 3D printed mannequins of four young men wearing streetwear. They too are confrontational and eerily realistic as they straddle the lip of the uncanny valley.

Process is equal to product for Abloh. As a designer, the final product is the primary goal, but in this

exhibition, Abloh shows the artistic value of his creative process itself. A set of silkscreens populate the walls of a gallery full of racks of clothing from some of Abloh's various Off-White collections. The inverted images are transposed with the ghosts of screens past. It feels like a behind-the-scenes view of the production.

The exhibition is accompanied by a pop-up boutique on the top floor. The exhibition catalog is on display there, perched upon two podiums flanking a copier. The copier is available in case visitors want to copy a page out of the catalog.

The juxtaposition of the free copies along with Off-White brand garments costing thousands of dollars is reflective of the whole feeling of the exhibition, which strives to foster accessibility at varied levels of income and education. Art is no longer solely for the rich, but they are certainly welcome.

One thing that sets Abloh aside from others is his apparent focus on inspiring young artists to find their personal style and place within the ever-changing culture machine. It is exciting to see a young artist focusing not only inward but also outward. Abloh comes off in this work as being generous and challenging—good qualities for a teacher. In fact, Abloh has created a youth design challenge and held workshops throughout the summer.

While both art and design remain beholden to the wealthy, they are undergoing an interesting shift during the 21st century as the rhetoric of inclusivity takes its place alongside (or jars with) that of exclusivity. The demand for accessibility in the arts is being made and slowly addressed by institutions and industries. Abloh's work engages and plays with the themes of inequality. He has helped bridge the gap between streetwear and high fashion, opening a world of possibility for future designers.

Still only 38 years old, Abloh has carved out a unique place for himself in the world of haute couture. He has returned from that place to Chicago to share his process, prototypes, advice and outlook to the purists, tourists and everyone in between.

By Rebecca Memoli

Virgil Abloh, "Figures of Speech," is on view at the Museum of Contemporary Art until September 22.

Rebecca Memoli is a Chicago-based photographer and curator. She received her BFA from Pratt Institute and her MFA in Photography from Columbia College. Her work has been featured in several national and international group shows. Her latest curatorial project is "The Feeling is Mutual."

Virgil Abloh: "Figures of Speech." Installation view, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago. Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago.



"Childhood Mythologies" form & concept, Santa Fe, NM

A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away, near Tuba City, Arizona, Diné painter Ryan Singer, a member of the Tódich'ii'nii (Bitter Water) Clan, grew up drawing obsessively on and around Dinétah, or the Navajo Nation. He also spent many hours of his childhood taking in sci-fi and fantasy flicks with his older sister.

Today he lives and works in downtown Albuquerque, but the landscapes of his youth still figure prominently in his paintings, as do the iconic characters and creatures of cinematic myth who still enter his dream world at night. Explaining his predilection for picture making, he states, "My mother always got me art supplies and encouraged me. I think that was all it took."

Singer's paintings are pop-surreal concoctions that elide traditional and contemporary Diné cultural references with sci-fi and gamer icons from mainstream sources in satirical ways that (at least initially) amuse and beguile. In "Childhood Mythologies," Singer's first solo foray at Santa Fe's form & concept gallery, the best moments are explorations of the intersectionality of indigeneity and the pop-mythology of the interstellar series *Star Wars*.

Singer's colorful style has a no-nonsense directness lifted in parts from comic books and modernist expressionism. It is designed for concision of execution and clarity of delivery. As with Honoré Daumier, dark outlines predominate; as with William Hogarth, the content ranges from pretty damn clever to outright hilarious.

(De)Colonized Ewok is an example of the latter. Side by side are painted portraits of an Ewok in traditional regalia and, again, the same Ewok dressed as a rebel commander at war with the Galactic Empire, a colonizing entity of extreme power. It evokes the photographic strategies of artists like Ana Mendieta, Adrian Piper or James Luna.

Indeed, the "Force" is strong with this one. In *Sand People Sand Painting*, two aliens alienated from Tatooine sit on small rugs on the floor of a traditional Hogan structure, precisely arranging colored sand to depict a geometric image of an R2D2-like droid.

The painting takes its power from the tongue-in-cheek humor of its central pun, and the less palatable fact that many Euro-Americans and their kids probably have a better grasp of the fictional culture of the Tusken Raiders than they do of the sacred realities of



Top: Ryan Singer, *(De)Colonized Ewok*, 2019. Acrylic on canvas, 30 x 40 in. Courtesy form & concept gallery, Santa Fe, NM.

Middle: Ryan Singer, *Sand People Sand Painting*, 2019. Acrylic on canvas, 30 x 40 in. Courtesy form & concept gallery, Santa Fe, NM.

Bottom: Ryan Singer, *Scorched Earth Policy*, 2019. Acrylic on canvas, 24 x 30 in. Courtesy form & concept gallery, Santa Fe, NM.

Indian country and the genocide of First Nations peoples carried out by their settler ancestors across this continent.

So, rally the rebels and resist. Our final scene is Singer's *Scorched Earth Policy*. The viewer looks over Darth Kit Carson's shoulder as he pursues an X-wing, piloted (presumably) by Chief Manuelito, as it navigates the tight canyon walls of a ubiquitous Southwestern desert landscape of red rock mesas and blue skies (ironically laced with chemtrails).

Instead of the mechanical channels of the imaginary Death Star, the setting is Canyon De Chelly in 1864, where Kit Carson enacted a "scorched earth policy" against the Diné, ordering his men to destroy all human beings, food crops and livestock, including ancient peach orchards, in order to starve the rebels out that winter. Those who hadn't already starved to death or suicided were forced to march over 400 miles across the desert for "relocation." Raise your hand, kiddos, if you've ever been "relocated", or contrariwise, if Cowboy Kit was one of your mythopoetic childhood heroes.

So, Singer's arch analogy comparing the so-called "greatest nation on earth" to the evilest force in the

galaxy is right on. From the very beginning, the United States of America has been under the control of Sith Lords in the form of colonial slave-rapists and self-proclaimed "Indian Killers" like Andrew Jackson and Honest Abe Lincoln. It is currently master-minded by Darth Donald, another and especially idiotic white supremacist who may well simply destroy all humanity through climate catastrophe denial and dumb time wasted on the dark side.

What is the story of your childhood? Is it one of struggle or one of privilege? And which of childhood's multiple mythologies still influence your dreams? These are the questions Ryan Singer's work poses. While ironic juxtapositions of pop-culture and native history initially cause guffaws and chuckles, that's just the spoonful of sugar, and before you know it, Singer's zingers have slipped you a dose of good medicine.

When I spoke to the artist, I remarked that while the work was quite successful, some of the pieces had a "dark subtext," as they included extremities of evil that our society generally prefers to whitewash. He said, "You could see it that way. I prefer to see it as using my art and sense of humor to raise awareness." It's an important distinction.

May the force (of course) be with you. Or as the People¹ say—May you walk in beauty. Through ancestry, upbringing, and wry observation, Ryan Singer seems to be doing just that, for as all artists know, there is no beauty without truth.

by Jon Carver

"Childhood Mythologies was on view at form & concept, Santa Fe, NM from March 29 through May 25, 2019.

Jon Carver writes and paints from his off-grid hideout at the back of a box canyon near Santa Fe. He is an instructor in studio arts and art history at the Institute of American Indian Arts.

¹ Almost every Native American tribe's name means "The People" or something similar in its own language.



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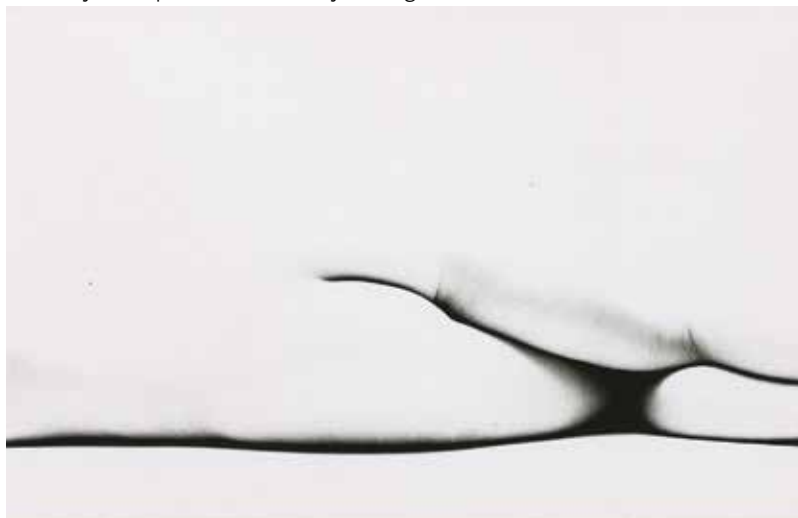
From an Interview on January 14, 2019

An enduring presence in the world of professional photography, Barbara Bachmann Crane, passed away in her Chicago home on August 7 at age 91. An iconic experimental and abstract Chicago photographer, Ms. Crane created images that are magical, transforming the ordinary into a philosophical question concerning the nature of the human experience. Her photographs contain ambiguity and offer the viewer many possible interpretations. Yet, as one continues to study her prints, one recognizes in them something elegant and beyond comprehension. The subject matter she captured was exceptionally diverse: from people to nature to architecture. Her work would define a city: Chicago.

Ms. Crane earned her BA in Art History from New York University and her MS in Photography from the Institute of Design at the Illinois Institute of Technology. Her work has been exhibited all over the globe, most recently at the Stephen Daiter Gallery in Chicago, and her photography appears in museums, such as the Art Institute of Chicago and the Museum of Contemporary Art. She published a number of books of photographs, namely *Private Views*, *Human Forms*, and *Chicago Loop*. In addition to being an artist, Ms. Crane was a distinguished professor of photography at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago for 28 years.

I had the opportunity to interview Barbara in January, and I quickly discerned that her story was as layered as her work.

Barbara Crane, *Human Forms*, 1964-65.
Courtesy of Stephen Daiter Gallery, Chicago.



Barbara Crane. Photo courtesy of Stephen Daiter Gallery, Chicago.

"There's a thing where I'm never satisfied with what I make," said Barbara. Barbara Crane was never satisfied with her work because she strived for perfection. And, in the course of our conversation, I learned that she, too, was never satisfied with how to portray herself: her intentions, her hopes, her doubts, her questions.

Like her work, she encompassed countless points of view and shades of light. She was defined—if it is, in fact, possible and useful to define her—by many equally powerful and distinctive identities: artist, teacher, woman, wife, mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. Yet, the way she lived, as evidenced by our four-hour conversation, defied classification. Her mind perpetually sought new perspectives on familiar subjects.

What will surely be immortalized about Barbara beyond her personality and products of creative energy was her process—apparent in the way she talked. In our conversation, Barbara was a compulsive editor of diction and syntax. This practice of rigorous revision extended to her work as well: "I no longer look at my notebooks [documenting times and places to which to return] because I'm involved



Left: Barbara Crane, *Chicago Loop*, 1976-78. Courtesy of Stephen Daiter Gallery, Chicago.



Right: . Barbara Crane, *Chicago Loop*, 1976-78. Courtesy of Stephen Daiter Gallery, Chicago.

with editing my work, to cull out incomplete ideas. I don't need any more pictures to store."

She was collaborative in developing her thoughts during our interview. One can well imagine how that quality served her in working with assistants on different photography projects. She even used to include her family in her artistic process: "I would lay my prints out on the living room floor, and my kids would choose the ones they liked. I figured they had uncluttered minds about art."

She commented on the challenges she faced: "It was very difficult to be taken seriously in what was once a predominantly all-male field." She described the challenge of balancing life with work: "I don't want family to feel neglected." She refocused and synthesized with a new declaration: "I've been fortunate to have both: family and my work."

"One thing we haven't addressed yet is how great-grandchildren are delightful." She paused. Her face lit up: "Or a wonderful thing might be better." We proceeded to discuss the merits and drawbacks of using this phrasing and settled on "delightful." There was nothing settling about Barbara. She was volcanic, penetrating her environment and fearlessly upsetting the proverbial applecart.

Her mind churned on: "I would question that I earned high acclaim.... There is a gallery in New York... one in Paris... one in Prague... one in Chicago." And she resolutely concluded: "But I've exhibited work in shows all over the world!" She looked at me. I wasn't quite

sure what she wanted. I realized she wasn't looking at *me*. I was the backdrop of an emerging thought that she would discover and reform in the time ahead.

Crane's eyes searched the room. "You see, I'm always looking and evaluating the quality of light on the subject matter. Form and content." Her eyes fixed on me. "That could be the ending." Barbara suggested many possible endings to this piece in the course of our conversation, though ending her story seemed contrived and forced for this tireless warrior-poet.

"I'm interested in my images and ideas living on beyond my time." Her tone was matter-of-fact, yet possessing irresistible, endearing charm.

The elation of capturing a new kind of beauty was part of her motivation for making art and, like her quest for enduring influence, will be part of her legacy: "[Making art] is not just for self-esteem"—amending a previous statement—"it offers me solace when things are rough. It is my profession, yes, but I also want to discover new visual experiences."

Barbara was an artist and a teacher. She assumed many influential and, at times, competing roles throughout her life. She loved photography with a ferocity few can match: "I have no intention of giving it up, ever," she said.

by Charles Hershaw

Charles D. Hershaw is an educator who currently focuses on humanities instruction at the high school level. He holds an MA from Teachers College, Columbia University and is an admirer of filmmaking and photography.

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(773) 252-2232^Corbett vs Dempsey Gallery
2156 W. Fulton St., Chicago, IL 60612
(773) 278-1664

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740 N. Wells St., Chicago, IL 60654
(312) 266-8512

Chicago Artists Coalition

2130 W Fulton St unit b,
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Firecat Projects

2124 N. Damen Ave., Chicago, IL 60647
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Hilton | Asmus Contemporary

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300 W. Superior St. Chicago, IL 60654
(312) 722-6447

Weinberg/Newton Gallery

688 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60654
(312) 529-5090

Can You Believe What You've Missed in 20 Months?



Volume 32, Issue 3: January/February 2018

"Is Art School a Scam?" Richard Siegesmund delivers a critique of current art education
Jen Delos Reyes offers ideas about a radical school of art and art history for the 21st century
Diane Thodos describes the 1980s takeover of art schools by neoliberal economic values
Michel Ségard reviews a rare exhibition of French photographer Hervé Guibert



Volume 32, Issue 4: March/April 2018

"Fake Art, Fake News and 'Real Fake' Art News" by Phillip Barcio
"40 Years ON: An Activist legacy Turns Institutional" by Evan Carter
Reviews by New York and Los Angeles correspondents
"In the Land of Pasaquan": The Visions of St. Eom" by Nathan Worcester



Volume 32, Issue 5: May/June 2018

Women challenged to smash artistic, sexual and gender stereotypes
"Looking Back, Looking Forward: Howardine Pindell" by Evan Carter
A journey into Richard Shipps' counterform world
Remembering Jim Yood



Volume 32, Issue 6: July/August 2018

Patric McCoy, pioneering South Side art collector
Seven reviews of shows by South Side artists
Cleveland prepares to host FRONT International: Cleveland Triennial for Contemporary Art
Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists-sponsored show features Martyl and (art)ⁿ



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James Elkins updates his 2003 treatise on art criticism
Siegesmund and Spector on the critic's essential role
Eight noted artists and critics offer their own opinions on the purpose and value of art criticism
MCA's sprawling show "I Was Raised on the Internet"



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Maggie Taft selects 10 excerpts from the book *Art in Chicago: A History from the Fire to Now*
Phillip Barcio examines the history of Chicago art fairs
Lauren Whitney explores examples of notable Chicago architecture built over the last 50 years



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Dawoud Bey Book Proves His Photographic Mastery over 40-Year Span
A Unique Dealer Heads Chicago's Oldest Michigan Avenue Gallery



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Learning to Unlearn: Abandoning Museum Neutrality
Two University Museum Directors Speak About New Challenges
Queer Encounters of Intimacy Shown in Video Game Exhibit



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Tom Mullaney recounts the history of public art controversies
K.A. Letts surveys public art and its history in Detroit
Evan Carter reviews architecture's role regarding social issues at Wrightwood 659 exhibition



Volume 33, Issue 6: July/August 2019

Gallerists Pioneer New Art Neighborhood While Others Are Content to Buck the Trend
Dual Reviews of Wrightwood 659's "About Face: Stonewall, Revolt, and New Queer Art"
Whitney Biennial Shows Less Political Art Than in Years Past
Reviews from Detroit, Milwaukee, and St. Louis

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